

Listing Of the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1-38. (Canceled).

39. (Previously Presented) A method for providing communication among a client system, server system and an electronic communications network, the client system including a Central Processor Unit (CPU), volatile working memory associated with the CPU, and a communications interface, the client system further running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running server software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method comprising:

specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said receiving.

40. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the method further includes the following performed prior to said specifying:

receiving said one or more missing components from the server system; and
installing said one or more missing components.

41. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the method further includes the following performed prior to said specifying:

searching the client system for install files containing any of said one or more missing components;

installing any missing components found in said searching;

receiving any additional missing components from the server system; and

installing said additional missing components.

42. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the client software has one or more outdated components and the method further includes the following performed prior to said specifying:

receiving a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components from the server system; and

installing said current version corresponding to each of said outdated components.

43. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, further including the following performed prior to said specifying if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network:

storing said settings in the volatile working memory;
requesting assignment of an IP address from the server system; and
receiving said IP address from the server system.

44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, further including periodically sending a periodic connect signal to the server system confirming that the client system is still connected.

45. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein said billing approve/reject signal is a temporary approval signal.

46. (Currently Amended) A method for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method comprising:

providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; and

conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting.

47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, further comprising assigning an IP address to the client system prior to said providing.

48. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein the client system has client software and the method further comprises the following performed prior to said providing:

determining if the client software on the client system is missing any components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network;

receiving information from the client system as to whether install files exist for said missing components in the client system; and

providing to the client system any additional missing components that do not have install files on the client system.

49. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein the client system has client software and the method further comprises the following performed prior to said providing:

determining if the client software on the client system has any outdated components; and
providing to the client system a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components.

50. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, further including performing the following prior to said providing if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network:

receiving a request for assignment of an IP address from the client system;

assigning an IP address to the client system; and

forwarding said IP address to the client system.

51. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein a plurality of client systems are in communication with the server system and the method further comprises:

maintaining a database tracking identifying information for each of said client systems in communication with the server system; and

for each of said plurality of client systems, recording in said database billing information for each respective client system and data representing an amount of monetary charges accumulated by each of said respective client systems.

52. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, wherein said data representing said amount of monetary charges includes data representing connect time.

53. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, further comprising:
recording data representing a total amount of monetary charges for each respective client system following disconnection of the client system;

transmitting said total amount of monetary charges to a network management system; and

processing account billing corresponding to the total amount of monetary charges in the network management system.

54. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, further comprising:

- receiving a periodic connect signal from the client system confirming that the client system is still connected;
- providing a clock signal;
- determining if said periodic connect signal is received from the client system within a predetermined period based on said clock signal;
- setting a disconnect parameter if it is determined that said periodic connect signal has not been received from the client system within said predetermined period.

55. (Currently Amended) A method for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method comprising:

- providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

- receiving a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

- sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system; and
conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system.

56. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 55, further comprising:
receiving a rejection signal from the remote approval system;
transmitting a rejection signal from the server system to the client system; and
discontinuing two-way communications with the client system.

57. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 55, further comprising:
sending a rejection signal to the client system; and
receiving additional billing information from the client system.

58. (Previously Presented) A client system for communicating with an electronic communication network via a server system, the client system comprising:
a central processing unit (CPU);
volatile working memory associated with said CPU;
a communications interface coupled to said CPU and volatile working memory; and
client software coupled to said CPU, volatile working memory, and communications interface, said client software configured for:

specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said receiving.

59. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the client software is further configured to perform the following prior to said specifying:

receiving said one or more missing components from the server system; and

installing said one or more missing components.

60. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the client software is further configured to perform the following prior to said specifying:

searching the client system for install files containing any of said one or more missing components;

installing any missing components found in said searching;

receiving any additional missing components from the server system; and
installing said additional missing components.

61. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software has one or more outdated components and the client software is further configured to perform the following prior to said specifying:

receiving a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components from the server system; and

installing said current version corresponding to each of said outdated components.

62. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software is further configured to perform the following prior to said specifying if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network:

storing said settings in the volatile working memory;

requesting assignment of an IP address from the server system; and

receiving said IP address from the server system.

63. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software is further configured for periodically sending a periodic connect signal to the server system confirming that the client system is still connected.

64. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein said billing approve/reject signal is a temporary approval signal.

65. (Currently Amended) A server system for facilitating communications between a client system and an electronic communication network comprising:

a processor; and

software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system, said software configured for:

providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; and

conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting.

66. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 65, wherein said software is further configured for assigning an IP address to the client system prior to said providing.

67. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 65, wherein the client system has client software and said software on the server system is further configured to perform the following prior to said providing:

determining if the client software on the client system is missing any components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network;

receiving information from the client system as to whether install files exist for said missing components in the client system; and

providing to the client system any additional missing components that do not have install files on the client system.

68. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 65, wherein the client system has client software and said software on said server system is further configured to perform the following prior to said providing:

determining if the client software on the client system has any outdated components; and
providing to the client system a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components.

69. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 65, wherein said software is further configured to perform the following prior to said providing if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network:

receiving a request for assignment of an IP address from the client system;
assigning an IP address to the client system; and
forwarding said IP address to the client system.

70. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 65, wherein a plurality of client systems are in communication with the server system and said software is further configured for:

maintaining a database tracking identifying information for each of said client systems in communication with the server system; and

for each of said plurality of client systems, recording in said database billing information for each respective client system and data representing an amount of monetary charges accumulated by each of said respective client systems.

71. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 70, wherein said data representing said amount of monetary charges includes data representing connect time.

72. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 70, wherein said software is further configured for:

recording data representing a total amount of monetary charges for each respective client system following disconnection of the client system;

transmitting said total amount of monetary charges to a network management system; and

processing account billing corresponding to the total amount of monetary charges in the network management system.

73. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 65, wherein said software is further configured for:

receiving a periodic connect signal from the client system confirming that the client system is still connected;

providing a clock signal;

determining if said periodic connect signal is received from the client system within a predetermined period based on said clock signal;

setting a disconnect parameter if it is determined that said periodic connect signal has not been received from the client system within said predetermined period.

74. (Currently Amended) A server system for facilitating communications between a client system and an electronic communication network comprising:

a processor; and

software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system, said software configured for:

providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system.

75. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 74, wherein said software is further configured for:

- receiving a rejection signal from the remote approval system;
- transmitting a rejection signal from the server system to the client system; and
- discontinuing two-way communications with the client system.

76. (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 74, wherein said software is further configured for:

- sending a rejection signal to the client system; and
- receiving additional billing information from the client system.

77. (Currently Amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for providing communication among a client system, server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system including a Central Processor Unit (CPU), volatile working memory associated with the CPU, and a communications interface, the client system further running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running server software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method comprising:

specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said receiving.

78. (Currently Amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the method comprising:

providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; and

conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting.

79. (Currently Amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the method comprising:

providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system.

80. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing communication among a client system, server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system including a Central Processor Unit (CPU), volatile working memory associated with the CPU, and a communications interface, the client system further running client software for managing the

communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running server software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the apparatus comprising:

means for specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

means for transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

means for receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; and

means for conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said receiving.

81. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the apparatus comprising:

means for providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

means for receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

means for transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; and

means for conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting.

82. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the apparatus comprising:

means for providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

means for receiving a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

means for sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

means for sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system; and

means for conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system.